

AS PLAIN AS DAY—

One of a Series of Complete Stories.

BY ELLIS PARKER BUTLER

THE simplest matters may appear mysterious and inexplicable when we lack the clue. Conversely, the most impossible and supernatural become childishly simple when all the foundations and props that sustain them are made visible.

As a clubman, Morley Smith was a perfect specimen of the type. He was nothing else. In a thousand clubs there are a thousand like him; at least one of him, and the fines and sturdiest clubs may have as many as six. He was a bachelorette, middle-aged, well-groomed, and could pick him out of a hundred on a blind night by the perfection of his white tie, the ultra-perfection of his evening coat, and the rather high collar came from the highbells he had swallows to brace himself for the occasion. To Morley Smith the club was greater than the reputations it was at once home and refuge to him. If a woman had asked him where he wished to go when he died, he would have answered—it he told the truth: "By Jove, nowhere off chap! This is about enough for me."

When spurred to recklessness by the war spirit that irritated him but did not include him, and called a book of adventure, Morley Smith had come from the club one night to seek romance by intruding himself into the home of one of the poorer class. He had no money, so he would have to do it all himself. He did, however, having tasted the fear and pleasure of finding himself in strange places, he found the desire to adventure return at such a time as this life being dull, and had gone forth again, wrapped in his costly fur-lined coat.

He found the adventures amusing. Thus far he had found them harmless, as well and back of his farther wanderings was a natural desire to tempt a little farther, just as a small boy taps on the door with the intention of breaking it in, striking a little harder each time, to see how hard it may be struck before it breaks. It always breaks at the last blow. Thus Morley Smith was urged to venture again and again, tempted to see how greatly he must dare before real danger came to him.

One pleasant night a year when the world had entered the war—late August, this was—Morley Smith sat at the club window looking out. The avenue was bright with lights. Soldiers in uniform, sailors and airmen in naval groupings passed. The window was open. The avenue busses were rushing by in the street. Morley Smith slipped a highball slowly. He was placid.

* * * *

UP the avenue three young fellows came. They were not of the avenue sort, and they were inclined to be playful. One struck the other and dodged, laughing. His fellow feinted and put out a foot, tripping him. All three laughed. When they came abreast of the club window one of them stopped and looked at Morley Smith.

"Look at the big stiff!" he said, and then called: "Hey, ho! Hand me down a highball!"

Morley Smith did not change his expression. He wore a little red, but it was nothing the house committee could remedy, and he felt that his best treatment of the insulting affair would be to remain in his own dignity. That of the club boy was his anger. As the young fellows passed up the avenue Morley Smith felt disturbed and restless. He was usually able to sit in the window placidly, however, but without emotion of any kind, but the young hoodlums had forced an emotion on him. Like a man who has eaten pickles and ice cream, he felt an unusual stirring of him.

"By Jove!" he exclaimed restlessly, and a minute later he had retrieved his hat, stick and light top coat from the club coatroom and was on his way to the door. Once outside, he put his foot on the running board of a waiting taxicab.

"Where to, Mr. Smith?" asked the driver.

Morley Smith hesitated. Suddenly a spirit of utter recklessness surged through him. He was seeking adventure; very well! He would go the full limit!

"I say," he said, "Do you know the route to Westcote?"

"Yes, Mr. Smith."

"I want to go there, you know."

The driver turned the taxicab spinning in a half circle and bumped over the rough stretch of street to Madison. Morley Smith looked out the window. His blood had suddenly tinged in his veins. This was a big adventure, indeed. He was going to Westcote, where he had never been. He meant to ring the bell of a house he had never seen. There he would let happen what he wanted.

As a matter of fact, the town of Westcote was the quietest and most respectable in the vicinity, situated among its beautiful trees, a few miles from Manhattan on Long Island, and had Morley Smith but known it, saying "I will go to Westcote" for adventure, he would have said "I will go to Calamus."

The taxicab crossed the Queensborough bridge and rolled along Jackson avenue past the factories of Long Island, through villages that ran into each other. It swung around the shore of a bay and crossed a small stone bridge that spanned a creek. The driver slowed the cab at the side of the street there, and opened the door.

"This is Westcote, Mr. Smith," he said. "I don't know the place, very well. I have a few friends there."

"Jove, look out, Mr. Smith," said Morley Smith. "I dare say I'll have to ask a bit myself. The number is 446, what? And the street begins with a C, don't you know? Let's ask that postman chap, what?"

The driver hauled the letter carrier.

"Begins with a C? Might be Calamus street."

"That's it—Calamus," said Morley Smith eagerly, although he had not had the slightest knowledge that Westcote had a C, and added, "How do you know, my good fellow?"

The postman gave the direction clearly, pointing with his hand and telling the turns to make. He accepted the cigar Morley Smith offered him, and the taxicab rolled away.

"Just wait here," he said, and walked up the short cement path to the porch.

The house was dark, but so were about half the houses on the street, for the hour was now, about 10, and most of the inhabitants had retired for the night. Morley Smith in choosing a house number at random and a street by chance, had already thought of a plan that might gain him admission to the house to the rest of romance—once anyone put out of one's usual run of life for romance. When the door opened, he meant to ask: "Beg pardon, but is there Mrs. Morley Smith here?"

The answer would be negative, since he was himself Morley Smith, and most certainly did not live there. Therefore he would assume an air of surprise, or at least subtlety, had he not lived in that house. He then meant to say: "I say, what? Beg your pardon, don't you know?" He would appear incredulous and would take out his watch and show the time to his pocket. "But, I say," he would protest, as he turned the pages, "who does live here, then?" Whoever had come to the door would then remark: "John Smith lives here," or "John Doe lives here." As soon

as he heard the name, Morley Smith meant to smile cheerfully at the little boy, and say: "That's the name. My mistake, you know. Cawdoo make out how I got so confused when I had the street and number right. It's true."

It was an excellent plan for gaining admission to any house, but for a while it did not seem as if it was to work, for this particular house. It appeared that the owner was coming to the door. Morley Smith pushed the bell-button again, letting his finger rest on it lengthily. He knew, not to have brought a firearm with him when your note gave a good sign that there might be some sort of a row."

"You liar! I didn't write him a word. Ed. I couldn't... I never saw or heard of him before!"

Mr. Smith winked openly at the woman.

"Right-o!" he exclaimed. She was telling the truth, Edward, old buck. I don't mind what I've been saying. I've only been spoofing a bit for the fun of the thing. I never saw the dame before."

"That's the truth, Ed," said the woman. "What's the solemn truth?"

"Quite so," said Morley Smith. "So I'll just toddle along."

"No, you don't!" exclaimed the man, barring the way. "I saw that wink you put on him. I think settled, crossed by this woman. I never could get it through my head why you were so stuck on me." He said the woman when you were all class two or the class where I've been thinking you were tired of me, the way you've been acting lately."

him. I'm through now. He thought you had a bunch of bulls out there but as he eyed her he let me out of his mind. His yellow. Listen: you butted into this—can you help me get away from him? He's been getting more of a brute to me every day, and he'll kill me yet if I don't get away from him."

She put her hand on Morley Smith's arm and looked into his face, but as her eyes fell she also looked at the man behind him. The woman looked at the money before she tucked it away in her waist. Then she turned to open the door, and the woman conversed. The woman did not speak of the calling. She was giving Morley Smith what she had been told that greatest of all men, Morley Smith, was stoic, unromantic, free from affectation. It was an ignorant back, not in the least cognizant of the amazing things that can happen in the next world. Morley Smith rather liked them.

Morley Smith stepped forward quickly to open the door.

"I say," he said boldly, "I've a car outside. As I was, didn't you know, when you were, didn't you know, when you were, burglar and cheap gambler; that's what he is. He's a crook. Ed. Is. Look here—let me show you where he beat me up last night when he came home drunk."

She tried to roll up her sleeve, but it was too tight.

"Never mind," she said. "You can guess how it looks—all black and blue and what I've been saying. I've been his slave, the brute! I haven't dared to call my life my own. You don't know what that means, you men."

"Back to New York, Henry," Morley Smith said.

for use in case of necessity. It was over a thousand dollars; that he had come out again with a friend and was being driven back to New York. Nothing could be more ordinary, from the driver's point of view, than the fact that greatest of all men, Morley Smith, was stoic, unromantic, free from affectation. It was an ignorant back, not in the least cognizant of the amazing things that can happen in the next world. Morley Smith rather liked them.

Morley Smith listened, saying a word now and then, but his thoughts were not of what she was saying. He was thinking of his own self, of course, and he had ventured from his club chair into the realms of romance and adventure. It was the impossible back to the driver's point of view, the sheet of glass between.

"That's kind," she said. "Of course I will be glad."

Morley Smith opened the door. The driver, the taxicab, the door, to him, was as if he had himself as they approached. He opened the door of the cab and went forward to crank the car while Morley Smith helped the woman get in.

"Morley Smith, I wonder what the driver would think if he knew the corner of our little adventure had been through that night. How near one could be to romance without

recognizing it!" To the driver the driver, the door, the taxicab, the end of the day's work. He had taken a fare aboard, had driven the fare to the destination, had slept on his seat and was now making a return trip.

Mr. Smith had entered a house, the driver, the door, the taxicab, the end of the day's work. "I don't stand nonsense. This man is one of our clubmen. He belongs to our club. I don't let things happen to our clubmen when I am there."

The man still hesitated.

"Come across, sis!" said the driver firmly. "We've got it on them. We've had Mr. Smith out on these little trips before. I don't think you'd be much of a help to us if we got into trouble. Ed and you in there. I saw you pocket Mr. Smith's roll. Do you come across, or do I blow the whistle?"

"You better!" the woman cried.

"You're a nice brother to have!"

The woman took the roll of money from its resting place in the bottom of her waist-belt. Then she stepped to the walk and hurried across it and into the apartment.

"Henry did not so much as look after her."

"The club, Mr. Smith," he asked.

"I want to go downtown."

The taxicab did not stop. It ran to the corner and turned sharply, and then stopped before an intersection. "What?" The woman stopped suddenly, as if it threw Morley Smith, leaning forward, to his knees, and the next instant the

driver had opened the door beside the woman. She drew back into the cab. "All right, here you are, sis!" said the driver. "Hop out."

"The first," said the driver. "just had to have it. Smith's roll. Tough it up! Quick!"

The woman hesitated, but Henry put a police whistle to his lips and said nothing more.

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The taxicab did not stop. It ran to the corner and turned sharply, and then stopped before an intersection.

"Right-o," said Morley Smith, but with an great enthusiasm. He left with a smile.

"Morley Smith, I wonder what the driver would think if he knew the corner of our little adventure had been through that night. How near one could be to romance without

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THE MIRRORS OF DOWNING STREET

SOME POLITICAL REFLECTIONS

By "A Gentleman With a Duster."

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Mr. Asquith

The Right Honorable Herbert Henry Asquith, born at Morley, Yorkshire, 1852. Education: City of London School, Hall Green, Birmingham, and Lincoln's Inn, 1870; Q. C. (Queen's Counsel), 1886; solicitor, 1889; member of parliament, 1892; chancellor of the exchequer, 1905-6; secretary of war, 1914; first lord of the treasury and lord president of the council, 1916-1918; Edinburgh, Glasgow, Cambridge, Leeds, St. Andrews and Bristol.

NOTHING in Mr. Asquith's career is more striking than his fall from power: it was as if a pin had dropped. Great men do not at any time fall in so ignominious a fashion, much less when the fate of a great empire is in the balance.

The truth is that Mr. Asquith possesses all the appearance of greatness, but few of its elements. He has dignity of presence, an almost unrivaled mastery of language, a trenchant dialectic. In judgment, however, he is entirely without creative power and has outgrown that energy of moral earnestness which characterized the early years of his political life.

He has never had an idea of his own, but a sound sagacity of his mind is derived from the wisdom of other men. He is a cistern and not a fountain.

His scholarship has made no difference to scholarship. His moral earnestness has made no difference to morality. He acquired scholarship by rote, politics by association and morality by tradition. To none of these things did he bring his own original passion.

His force in his youth was ambition and the goal of his energy was success. No man ever labored harder to judge between the thoughts of conflicting parties when he was in office, even less to think for themselves. He would have made a noble judge; he might have been a powerful statesman; he could never have been a great man. Bismarck and Gladstone were great men.

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HERE are reasons for suspecting his moral qualities. When he allowed Lord Haldane to resign from the cabinet at the shout of a few journalists he sacrificed the oldest of his friends to political exigencies. This was bad enough, but what made it worse was that he had done it in a moment that had occupied an hour after the invasion of Belgium would have been swept out of existence by the wrath and indignation of the people. He had no scruples, but he was not a man of strong character.

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It is a mistake to say he brought England into the war. England entered the war because of the way in which politicians speak of Mr. Asquith as "having preserved the unity of the nation" in August, 1914, in index entries of the degraded condition that had resulted an hour after the invasion of Belgium would have been swept out of existence by the wrath and indignation of the people.

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cepted by the world as touchingly paternal—the old man did not so much lean upon his high-spirited child as smile upon him with a gentle smile.

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